

Congressman
J. Randy Forbes
Fourth District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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July 9, 2003



Forbes' Technology Legislation Reviewed by House Subcommittee

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Research Subcommittee of the House Science Committee held a hearing on legislation introduced by Congressman J. Randy Forbes (VA-04). The bill, H.R. 2183, the Minority-Serving Institution Digital & Wireless Network Technology Opportunity Act of 2003, would establish a new grant program within the National Science Foundation (NSF), providing up to \$250 million to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges bridge the economic opportunity gap.

This legislation is designed to strengthen and upgrade the technological infrastructure at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI's). It would offer opportunities to MSI's such as computer acquisition, campus wiring and technology training, enabling them to offer students the same access that students at other institutions of higher learning have.

Speaking before the subcommittee today, Forbes stated, "Full access to technology has become the standard, not a bonus, in how we communicate and do our jobs everyday. Right now, 60 percent of all jobs require information technology skills and information technology jobs pay significantly higher than jobs in non-technology related fields, yet minority-serving institutions lack the basic information and digital technology infrastructure needed to provide their students the necessary skills and access to compete and qualify for America's best paying jobs."

Dr. Fred Humphries, President of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, testified before the subcommittee today in support of the bill, "It [H.R. 2183] will go a long way in promoting the establishment of a technology-based curriculum that enable HBCU's to recruit, retain and graduate students who are more competitive in the increasingly technology-based global economy and in the graduate and professional institutions."

At the hearing, Forbes cited a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* revealing that at Virginia State University, which is located within the Fourth District, only 10 percent of the students own computers, compared to 96 percent of students at the University of Richmond.

“Only three percent of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities indicated that financial aid was available to help their students close the computer ownership gap. This legislation will strengthen these institutions, and all Minority-Serving Institutions, so they can provide their students the access and the resources necessary to compete in our technology-dependent world,” Forbes commented after the hearing.

Senator George Allen, who also testified in support of Forbes’ legislation today, sponsored an identical bill in the Senate, where it passed 97-0. The Research Subcommittee has tentatively scheduled a mark-up of H.R. 2183 next week.

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